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ABSTRACT

For centuries American Indians have been an object of Western fascination. All too often this fascination has been an invented view of Indian people. This is especially evident with the recent movement of Indian people to urban areas within the United States and Canada. Not only has this movement been ignored by society in general, but it has also received almost no comment in the geographical literature. The complex character of urban Indian communities is sketched and a variety of interpretations are outlined. Finally, the implications for planning and public policy are examined, i.e, the recent emergence of Indian organizations which provide an innovative alternative -- cultural planning for urban redevelopment. (Author/AH)

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URBAN INDIANS:

PATTERNS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

by

Bryan Higgins

Presented at the 78th Annual Meeting of the
Association of American Geographers
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URBAN INDIANS: PATTERNS AND TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT

For centuries American Indians have been an object of Western fascination. All too often though this fascination has been an invented view of Indian people. This is especially evident with the recent movement of Indian people to urban areas within the United States and Canada. Not only has this movement been ignored by society in general but, it has also received almost no comment in the geographical literature. The complex character of urban Indian communities is sketched and a variety of interpretations are outlined. Finally the implications for planning and public policy are examined. In this regard the recent emergence of Indian organizations provides an innovative alternative -- cultural planning for urban redevelopment.

Urban Indians: Patterns and Transformations

A Dilemma of Fascination

Ever since European explorers made their first contact with residents of North America both Europeans and later Euro-Americans have been fascinated with the vivid details of tribal living. This fascination is visible in a wide variety of academic disciplines as well as providing a familiar topic for movies, novels, and many other forms of contemporary culture. In a remarkable display of endurance this fascination has survived for 500 years; providing Western culture with an abundance of symbols--such as the Washington Redskins, titles--such as Commander and Chief, and place names--such as Seattle, Washington.

While a great deal of attention continues to be focused on certain romatic symbols and American Indian artifacts, much more seldom are the significant contributions of American Indians to geographical knowledge, agricultural productivity, or political theory acknowledged.[1] In addition to this very superficial memory of Indians in general, it is also a rare comment which does not focus on Indian people as a cultural group of the past. Many writers have discussed the dilemma this historical distortion presents

for Indian people. Recently Vine Deloria has written sharp and lively studies of the philosophical and political issues facing Indian communities today. A major impasse he identifies is the inability of non-Indians to accept Indians as contemporary beings. Instead he argues, they insist on reciting a past which in a large part projects Christian religion and Western geographical notions.[2] The social effects of this perspective are critical since such presentations may veil the controversies of a dwindling reservation land base as well as the living reality of urban Indian communities today.

Other writers have also jumped into the thicket of describing contemporary American Indian living. Some of Stan Steiner's vivid stories recount the formation of Indian, political-action groups in the late 1950s.[3] Besides these apercus, Steiner also graphically describes the conflict between traditional Indian philosophies of the land and the profane attitudes of modern development interests. In a very direct and poignant way his stories illustrate both the impact of America's urban development on todays reservations and an urban Indian way of life.

Another writer who has produced a wide selection of essays and books on urban Indians is Gerald Vizenor. In his newspaper reports, poetry, essays, and numerous books, Vizenor sketches the character and personality of American Indians. Some of his narratives describe the formation of the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) in the late 1960's; including both the controversies and contradictions associated with this urban social movement.[4] Other stories in Wordarrows masterfully blend fact and fiction as they convey the personal struggles and humor of American Indian people in an urban environment. These passionate and funny stories describe what

Vizenor has termed the "new fur trade". This metaphor identifies the social and cultural word-wars of contemporary society. It is Vizenor's opinion that these struggles embody the modern version of a continuing exploitation of Indian people.

Lawyers and citizen advocates have also written about the relationship between White and Indian cultures, emphasizing the legal dimensions. Felix Cohen provides one of the best surveys of United States Indian law up to 1940. With a more theoretical bent, Wilcomb Washburn's scholarly study on the treatment of American Indians starts with the theoretical geography assumed by Europeans at the time they discovered the Americas. His very detailed study then sketches the legal approaches which supported this manifest destiny during the 18th and 19th centuries. Finally he explicates the major legal struggles involved with American Indians in the 20th century. In addition to these legal studies, social planners and citizen advocates in the United States, such as Meriam and Tyler, have also analyzed federal Indian policies. These studies usually focus on the Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.) which, it is interesting to note, functionally came into being in 1834 as a division of the United States War Department.[5] The social engineering of B.I.A. policy and their initiation of urban relocation programs in the late 1950's played a significant role in the changing residence of Indian people.

Another fertile source of knowledge on American Indians in urban environments is contemporary American Indian fiction.[6] Probably the most widely read novel in this regard is House Made of Dawn by N. Scott Momaday. This Pulitzer Prize winning story was one of the first to explore the living conditions of Indian people in an urban area; Los Angeles, and one of

Momaday's first books. Throughout the novel a tension is described between the interests of a White, urban world and living on a reservation. The many forms of conflict between White and Indian worlds are also expressed in the works of James Welch, John Fire Lame Deer, and Leslie Marmon Silko. These writers, and many others who are just starting to be recognized, express the conflicts, exploitation and contemporary realities of Indian living in the United States.

The previously mentioned philosophers, activists, lawyers, and novelists express a vivid picture of urban Indians. In contrast to these writers the predominant pattern in American society has been for Indian people to be either degraded, totally ignored, or celebrated as a romantic symbol of a past era. In response to this distorted presentation and the related social impacts in the United States the preceding writers have investigated and portrayed a new perspective of American Indian people. Their urban stories and critiques of social policy are just beginning to be recognized.

The Place of American Indians in Geography

Within geography journals the topic of American Indians has been discussed from the very earliest days of the discipline in North America.[7] In fact, some of the first articles on Indian people appeared in the American Geographical Society Journal in 1874.[8] These early articles provide a survey of such classical topics as the Indian territory and its inhabitants, prehistoric residents of the Mississippi Valley, and the ruins found by Coronado in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Starting with these articles, an investigation of the ensuing geographical literature may identify the place of American Indians in Geography.

A survey of this literature shows that, with a very few recent exceptions, the focus of this writing is exclusively on a rural or reservation environment.[9] Typical topics in this rural landscape inquiry include: relict Indian corn fields near Middlesex, New Jersey; winter hunting with a Labrador Eskimo; totem poles; and Pre-Columbian agriculture. In this field of inquiry no mention is made of urban Indians, despite the recent trend toward urban residence. See Table 1.[10] In addition, even the American Indian cities and complex metropolitan systems which flourished at different times and places in the Americas are not topics of inquiry.

Table 1

A closer look at the contents and references in these professional articles shows another important trend. Both as a source of ideas and as support for their arguments, these works quote almost exclusively non-Indian experts. Is it possible that non-Indians could know so much more about Indians than Indian people themselves? Or could it be that such descriptions provide an intellectualized version of a Hollywood Indian? Following this possible analogy shows that in academic geography, as in the movies, many of the articles are complete with the accouterments of an exotic material culture, bison hunts, and a final desperate effort to preserve a vanishing culture.

Perhaps with these academic stories, as with those wonderful Hollywood Westerns, the role of the Indian is pre-ordained by a philosophical pattern of Western society. If such a narrative structure is present, as it most certainly is in Hollywood Westerns, it really does not matter that the actors who speak Indian lines, or in journal articles speak as Indian experts,

Table 1

Year	Urban	Rural	Total Population
1910	4%	96%	265,683
1920	6	94	244,437
1930	10	90	332,397
1940	8	92	333,969
1950	16	84	343,410
1960	28	72	523,591
1970	45	55	763,594
1980	-Not Yet Available-		1,418,195

American Indians in the United States
Source: United States Bureau of the Census

are actually not Indians at all.[11] This is because meaning within a Hollywood Western depends upon a symbolic structure, just as within geography meaning is based on a philosophical structure of the discipline.[12] Although it is not the intent of this paper to provide a structuralist analysis of American Indians in the geographical literature, such Levi-Strauss style investigation could provide insight into the mind of Western geography. Beyond any pedagogic value such structuralist anaiysis would also make it possible to examine the devastating influence this state of mind has had on the formation of social policy within the United States.

Another pattern found in this literature is its focus on only the past settlements of American Indian people. Even in the case of those articles published during the 19th century the subject matter is not a living, Indian community. Instead the excavation of ancient ruins and pedantic, Euro-American speculations provide the focus for discussion. From a practical perspective this disregard for living people, as opposed to the fascination with ancient ruins, may be evidence of very misplaced attention. For example, in 1921 Thomas English wrote an article titled, "The Cahokia Indian mounds-a plea for their preservation."[13] At the same time in over one hundred years of journal articles there is not one plea for the preservation of living, Indian people.

A final pattern found in the exposition of historical geographies of American Indians is that they usually chronicle the surrender or disappearance of Indian people. While the European invasion of North America no doubt had an apocalyptic effect upon tribal peoples, population figures from the United States Census indicate that the Indian population has been steadily growing for the past 60 years. See Table 1. Given this prolonged

trend of population increase, why does the geographical literature insist on exclusively repeating the theme of vanishing Indians? To raise such a question may be much simplier than to discuss the many issues which surround this topic.

Urban Indian Communities

The fact that geographers have been reticent to write about urban Indians should not be taken to mean that these communities are either invisible or do not have written sources of information. One valuable set of resources in this regard are the many Indian newspapers, magazines, and newsletters published periodically. One index of United States and Canadian Indian periodicals was able to identify 113 periodicals oriented, at least in part, for an Indian, Metis, or Eskimo readership.[14] In this listing 37 were published in Canada and 76 in the United States. Along with more recent publications this literature provides a starting place to investigate the contemporary voices of Indian people. The fact that these periodicals are based both in urban and reservation areas is important because the trend for Indian people to take up residence in urban areas has not only established a distinctive residence in a metropolitan setting, it has also resulted in many changes in the character of reservation life. Since a large percentage of urban Indian people keep in touch with their reservation, either through periodic visits or family life, to understand an urban setting it is also important to know the relationship between these two environments. In terms of identity for example, most reservation publications are directed toward one tribe, while the urban periodicals express the intertribal or pan-Indian orientation of urban residents. Finally, in

contrast to more academic studies these periodicals express the day to day events of urban living at the same time they debate issues of planning, policy, and political action.

Many descriptions of urban Indian communities focus on the number and location of residents. From the time of first White contact with Indian people a significant debate has gone on about tribal populations and the impact of population changes on tribal living.[15] During the initial stages of colonization in the United States this interest focused on the military strength of tribes and their political alliances. On some occasions the underestimation of Indian populations proved extremely embarrassing. One such case was Custer's estimates of the size of the Lakota community immediately before the battle of the Little Big Horn. Whether due to personal ambitions, the variety of population theories, or the changing definitions of the United States census it is not a simple matter to discuss the changing patterns of Indian residence. The statistics in Table 1 previously illustrated a trend toward a growing urban Indian population. Many people have criticized these United States census statistics for undercounting Indian people. The detailed survey of particular urban communities, designed and administered by Indian people, has recently documented much higher Indian population estimates than the census figures.[16] Realizing the limitations of official statistics then, Table 2 gives the census figures for the ten largest urban Indian communities in the United States. See Table 2.[17] The recent growth of these largest, urban communities is obvious. Perhaps this is most dramatically illustrated in Anchorage, Alaska where the population skyrocketed from 504 in 1970 to 8,901 in 1980; an increase of 1,700% in ten years.

Table 2

Table 2

		1960 SMSA	1970 SMSA	1970 City Only	1980 City Only
1.	Los Angeles	8,839	24,509	9,172	16,595
2.	Tulsa	7,608	15,519	8,477	13,740
3.	New York	4,366	12,160	9,930	11,824
4.	Oklahoma City	6,453	13,033	7,206	10,404
5.	Minneapolis	3,285	9,852	5,829	8,932
6.	Anchorage	*	*	504	8,901
7.	Albuquerque	3,378	5,839	3,351	7,341
8.	Seattle	3,817	9,496	4,123	6,253
9.	Chicago	4,153	8,996	6,575	6,072
10.	San Diego	3,293	5,880	2,247	5,065

Largest Urban Indian Communities in the United States
Source: United States Bureau of the Census
*In 1960 and 1970 Anchorage had no designated SMSA.

While these urban Indian communities have been steadily growing, their size relative to a total urban population may conceal this trend. For example, while Los Angeles had 16,595 Indian residents in 1980 this was out of a total population of 2,966,763 and comprised only 0.5 per cent of the total population. Of these largest Indian communities the highest relative size is achieved by the Indian community of Anchorage with 8,901 Indian residents in a city with a total population of 173,017; representing five per cent of the total population. One of the more obvious practical issues involved with the relatively small size of these urban communities is the difficulty they have achieving political representation or developing planning consideration within a local system of government.

Along with the general trend of rural to urban migration, another force which influenced the population shift for Indian people was the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Among their policies and programs in 1952 was the first national program to emphasize labor recruitment and relocation assistance for Indian people. In 1962 this "Voluntary Relocation Program" was renamed the "Employment Assistance Program" and its scope was broadened to include job placement not only on reservations, but also in certain metropolitan areas. Under this behavior-modification program, employment assistance centers were established in Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Jose, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Seattle.[18] The stated goal of this social policy was to disperse Indians among the general population in order to enhance their assimilation. Besides the obvious influence on the growth of urban Indian communities, another result of this initiative was renewed criticism of BIA policies. This debate involved the lack of Indian participation in developing BIA policies and the extent of

power the Secretary of Interior held over Indian people.

While an overall trend toward urbanization has been changing the place of American Indian residence, an uneven pattern of urbanization has resulted in the United States. Looking at states with the largest Indian populations in 1980, Table 3 shows their urban and rural distribution.[19] From these statistics a state may be considered: primarily rural--Arizona, New Mexico, North Carolina, Alaska, and South Dakota; primarily urban--California and Texas; or both urban and rural--Michigan, Washington, and Oklahoma. Among these states it is interesting to note that despite some preconceptions, predominantly rural states are found in the east, such as North Carolina, and predominantly urban states are found in the West, such as California and Texas. The size of a states urban and rural Indian population is important politically since it may influence the focus of a state's Indian programs. While a great deal of Indian planning is handled nationally, through the BIA, the recent change in Federal programming which provides Block Grants to state governments may increase the importance of these distributions in the state politics of an Indian community.

Table 3

A number of studies in sociology and anthropology have examined the character of specific urban communities.[20] One of the early investigations of a specific, urban community is Joan Ablon's study of American Indians in the San Francisco Bay area. Starting with a sketch of the BIA relocation policy, Ablon proceeded to study social interaction and pan-Indian identity in the Bay area. Unlike some views in this literature, which emphasize pan-Indianism as a structural defense mechanism or as a terminal phase in

Table 3

	1970			1980
	Urban	Rural	Total	Total
California	77%	23%	91,018	201,311
Oklahoma	48	52	98,468	169,464
Arizona	19	81	95,812	152,857
New Mexico	18	82	72,788	104,777
North Carolina	17	83	44,406	64,635
Alaska	30	70	16,276	64,047
Washington	53	47	33,386	60,771
South Dakota	26	74	32,365	45,101
Texas	85	15	17,957	40,074
Michigan	67	33	16,854	40,038

States With the Most American Indians in 1980
Source: United States Bureau of the Census

assimilation, she finds this movement to be a positive force in the development of an urban Indian community. It is also interesting to note that, despite the previously mentioned goals of assimilation prescribed by the BIA during this study Ablon found no residents she would consider assimilated.

Another early study of urban Indians is John Price's investigation of the adaptation of American Indians to Los Angeles. Perhaps the best summary of this study would be an alternative title, "101 Ways to pan Indian living in Los Angeles". That is by pure chance the study investigated some 101 tribal affiliations in the city. In addition its primary focus was to study the importance of a pan-Indian philosophy in this particular community. Among its controversial conclusions was that the majority of Los Angeles's Indians "look Indian" and that pan-Indianism is emerging to stabilize the trauma of their adaptation.

As with the previous examples most research on urban Indian communities has emphasized the evaluation of acculturation. From this research approach the academic image of an Indian community is compared to an idealized norm of White society. With this model different degrees of adaptation are described and interpreted. A few innovative studies have looked beyond this mentality to the political and economic environment of these communities. Graves study of the personal adjustment of Navajos in Denver, Colorado is one such study. His very stringent, scientific design analyzed various social and economic indicators of behavior. In this investigation Graves found that the complex of Navajo social problems (high arrest rate, alcoholism, etc.) could be accounted for without recourse to the fact that the subjects were Indians. In his words the economic marginality of this group was fundamental. From this analysis Graves argues that explanations which rely solely on

Indian culture to explain the social ills of this community may simply conceal the underlying processes in operation.

Taking this line of work even further Jorgensen has examined the complex relationships between the political economy of the United States, the BIA, and Indian people. Commenting on the recent urbanization of Indian communities he notes that, except for a few success stories, rural poverty has been traded for urban poverty. Central to his detailed study is an examination of the significance of the metropolis; a term he uses to identify concentrated economic and political power in the U.S.. Using both national and local examples he explicates the role of the metropolis in the persistence of Indian poverty. In conclusion Jorgensen finds that the social and economic deprivation of Indians is not due to any lack of cultural adaptation. Instead it is the result of the development process of a capitalist economy in the United States. From this perspective underdevelopment is present because Indians have been integrated into the political economy of the United States - albiet as superexploited victims.

From a variety of perspectives then a discussion of urban Indian communities is just beginning in the United States. This brief sketch illustrates that this topic involves much more than simple demographic description. As a general overview it has only hinted at the individual character of urban Indian communities. And yet, if one considers the Indian communities of Denver, San Francisco or Minneapolis,the general problem of obtaining accurate, Indian statistics or developing a political - economic understanding are also specific community issues today.

Cultural Planning and Urban Redevelopment

The social and economic conditions of urban Indian communities indicate that something is lacking in urban planning and public policy. While public welfare programs provide some Indian residents with a marginal existence, at the same time they tend to reenforce a pattern of passive dependency. An important redevelopment alternative which has appeared within Indian communities is the Indian organization. Although planning research has previously noted the importance of social meaning and offered the notion of social space; in practice it has been very difficult for Indian communities to implement any social plans or policies.[21] As a result, Indian organizations have emerged to fulfill this active role of planning and serving a socio-cultural community. The detailed investigation of Indian organizations in Minneapolis illustrates that such organizations may serve a wide variety of program functions.[22] For specific examples of this diversity see Table 4. A crucial feature of these organizations has been their ability to associate traditional cultural ways with contemporary program administration. This important development of a middle ground may be identified as cultural planning in an urban context.

Table 4

The evolution of Indian organizations is also significant in response to the political economy of urban redevelopment. Investigation of the urban land market by Harvey and others with a classical economic perspective has produced a model which includes occupiers, realtors, landlords, developers, financial institutions, and government institutions. As previously mentioned urban Indian residents have very limited social or economic resources to apply within

Table 4

Name of Organization	Purpose
American Indian Business Development Corp.	Economic Development
Anishinabe Longhouse	Criminal Rehabilitation
Indian Health Board	Health Care
Indian Neighborhood Club	Alcoholic Treatment
Little Earth of the United Tribes, Inc.	Non-profit Housing
Minneapolis American Indian Center	Recreation and Social Service
Opportunities Industrialization Center	Employment Training
The Neighborhood Center	Survival School
Wanaki House	Womans Alcoholic Treatment

Urban Indian Organizations in Minneapolis
Source: Higgins, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1980.

this scheme. Expanding on this development model Lauria has recently shown the significance of community controlled organizations in urban renewal. He describes the role of community organizations (such as tenants' unions, home-owner associations, land trusts, and community development credit unions) in competing for control of the urban redevelopment market. It is certainly not by mere coincidence that Indian organizations have emerged in these same re-development areas and under similar constraints. As with community organizations, Indian organizations are significant because they provide services where it is not profitable for traditional actors to operate. Thus, at the same time these organizations provide an important cultural identity they also present an attempt to more effectively deal with the political economy of a metropolitan area.

In addition to the innovative planning of Indian organizations, the growth of urban Indian communities also raises a broad range of general questions about developing and evaluating public policies. Certainly the intentions of a particular social or cultural community provide a critical foundation in planning. The way in which these intentions are included, modified, or excluded in public policies establishes both local and metropolitan patterns. For the development of urban Indian communities it may thus be important to look at planning and policies beyond the boundaries of a particular area. From such a metropolitan perspective cultural identity, social process, and participation in planning become critical forces in urban redevelopment.

Footnotes

[1]Exceptions are Alvin Josephy, The Indian Heritage of America (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1976), pp. 30-36 and Peter Farb, Man's Rise to Civilization (New York: Avon Books, 1971), pp. 126-144.

[2]Vine Deloria, Jr., God is Red (New York: Delta, 1973).

[3]Stan Steiner, The New Indians (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 28-38.

[4]Gerald Vizenor, Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 1976), pp. 49-80.

[5]Edgar Cahn and David Hearne, ed., Our Borthers Keeper: The Indian in White America (New York: Meridian Books, 1970), p. 5.

[6]See Abraham Chapman ed., Literature of the American Indians (New York: Meridian Books, 1975) and Charles R. Larson, American Indian Fiction (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978).

[7]For a bibliography of select geography journals see Russell Thornton and Mary Grasmick, On American Indians (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1979), pp. 17-24.

[8]Colonel E.C. Boudinot, "The Indian Territory and its inhabitants," American Geographical Society Journal, 19 (1874), pp. 217-224.

[9]One exception is Harvey K. Flad, "The Urban American Indians of Syracuse, New York: Human Exploration of Urban Ethnic Space," Antipode, 4 (1972), pp. 88-99.

[10]For trends among Canadian Indians see Edgar J. Dosman, Indians: The Urban Dilemma (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 13-46.

[11]For an analysis of American Indian images in the movies see Will Wright, Sixguns and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) and Gretchen Bataille and Charles Silet eds., The Pretend Indians (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980).

[12]Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 1-51.

[13]Thomas English, "The Cahokia Indian mounds: a plea for their preservation," Geographical Review, 11 (1921), pp. 207-211.

[14]John Price, U.S. and Canadian Indian Periodicals, (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1971).

[15]For a critical bibliography see Henry F. Dobyns, Native American Historical Demography (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

[16]One example of such study is Project for Pride in Living, "Technical Assistance to Local Authorities for Community Development," (Washington D.C.: Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1978), pp. 23-122.

[17]In 1960 information on American Indians was not available aggregated by individual municipalities. With 1980 census data, at the present time American Indian statistics are available only by individual municipality; not by standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA). In addition, no detailed 1980 statistics for cities in Arizona are presently available.

[18]Howard M. Bahr, "An End to Invisibility," in Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives, Bahr, Chadwick and Day eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 404-411.

[19]Urban and rural American Indian distributions for 1980 are not yet available.

[20]For a collection in anthropology see Jack Waddell and Michael Watson eds., The American Indian in Urban Society (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971) and for a collection in sociology see Bahr, Chadwick and Day eds., Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[21]Donald Appleyard, "The Environment as a Social Symbol," The Journal of the American Planning Association, 45 (April, 1979), pp. 143-153 and Anne Buttimer, "Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective," The Geographical Review, 59 (July, 1969), pp. 417-426.

[22]For a detailed analysis of planning and policy issues in an Indian community see Bryan Higgins, "Visions of People" (unpublished Ph.D., dissertation, University of Minnesota, Department of Geography, 1980), pp. 84-199.

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